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ABSTRACT

Because most maritime accidents are caused by human error, notably breakdowns in communication or cooperation, and because English is the international maritime language, instruction in maritime English for communication and cooperation is an important element in maritime education. The International Maritime Organization, a specialized agency of the United Nations, has established the World Maritime University (WMU) in Sweden to train specialist maritime personnel from developing countries. The university is a small, postgraduate institution providing instruction in shipping and related fields, including improvement of maritime safety. Students come with established careers or executive positions with shipping companies and port authorities, and from diverse cultures and educational and work experiences. WMU offers five courses in varied maritime fields, leading to a master of science degree. It is an English-medium university, and offers an intensive English language program. A pre-session course covers English for academic purposes. An 18-week and a 10-week course for non-native speakers provide general English and maritime English training for making oral presentations, preparing field training reports, writing a thesis, and participating in seminars and conferences. Over half the university's students attended intensive language training, which focuses on cross-cultural communication and sharing of expertise. (MSE)

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Teresa A. Thiel

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Introduction

The importance of seaways for transporting passengers and cargo, and for the livelihood of those in the fishing industry, is quite apparent in Indonesia, which has some of the busiest interisland ferry communications in the world. However, the tremendous volume and significance of international sea transport confronts us starkly only when a major maritime disaster is reported in the news, one which tragically affects people's lives, their livelihoods and their environment. Such reports unfortunately occur with increasing regularity.

The seas surrounding South East Asia have not escaped disaster. Recently a ferry sank off the coast of Sumatra, thus devastating an entire community. In 1994 a ferry collided with a containership in Manilla Bay and more than 100 people were drowned and in 1987, 4000 people died in the same area when a ferry was hit by an oil tanker. Nevertheless, disaster can strike apparently well-founded cruise and ferry vessels as much as mass transit operations in the Philippines or Indonesia. In 1994, a Baltic ferry, MS Estonia, capsized off the coast of Finland killing 838 people in Europe's worst ferry disaster for 50 years. In 1990, 158 people died in a fire on board the Scandinavian Star, a passenger ferry en route to Oslo in Norway.

Experience has shown, in fact, that most maritime accidents are caused by human error, notably breakdowns in communication or cooperation, exacerbated by the existence of an aging fleet. The design of roll-on, roll-off ferries has also been seriously called into question. In this paper, therefore, the role of Maritime English for Communication and Cooperation in the training of specialist maritime personnel is discussed.

Background to IMO and the establishment of WMU.

The International Maritime Organization, IMO, is one of the specialized agencies of the United Nations. It is recognized for its work in developing maritime conventions, codes and other regulations which promote the safety of international shipping and the prevention of pollution from ships. The two main goals of IMO are those of safer shipping and cleaner oceans.

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The most important development in IMO's Technical Cooperation programme has been the establishment of the World Maritime University in 1983 at Malmö, in Sweden. It is a global centre for the training of specialist maritime personnel from developing countries. In the words of the Secretary-General of IMO, W A O'Neill, the students who come to World Maritime University (WMU) have been prevented from fulfilling their full

potential frequently due to a lack of suitable training facilities in their home country, and often due to a lack of background of experience found in traditional maritime nations. There is still an acute shortage of highly trained specialist maritime personnel in developing countries. WMU aims to overcome this shortage. As the only international tertiary training institution so far established by a specialized agency of the United Nations, WMU fulfils a unique and important role in international education and training.

The City of Malmö in Sweden provided the campus for the establishment of the university and its residential hostel. Malmö is close to Copenhagen and is a focus for European transport and communications. It has a long maritime tradition. The government of Sweden and the UNDP provided financial support for WMU to operate under the privileges and immunities of a UN agency. Since its creation, funds for WMU have come from various sources, including the European Community, the World Bank, other Nordic countries, Canada, and the British Commonwealth.

The role of WMU

World Maritime University is a small postgraduate institution with about 200 mature age students. More than 1000 students, from 120 different countries, have graduated from WMU since its inception, including 60 female graduates. The purpose of WMU is to train senior specialist maritime personnel in various aspects of shipping and related fields, such as the improvement of maritime safety. The students come with established and successful careers, as master mariners, chief engineers, maritime educators, and administrators, or hold important executive positions with shipping companies and port authorities. Consequently, they come from diverse backgrounds, diverse cultures, diverse educational experiences, and diverse work experiences.

Every year up to 100 WMU graduates take up key positions in government ministries, in shipping company management, in port administration, in international organizations, in diplomatic missions or in maritime education institutions. In other words, WMU combines a university and a high level vocational institution. The fact that maritime specialists are gathered in one location and maritime personnel are brought to WMU for training has proved to be both efficient and cost effective.

WMU offers five courses in a number of different maritime fields leading to a Master of Science degree. These courses emphasize maritime environmental protection, integrated management of marine resources, efficiency of international shipping and improving maritime safety. The duration of the course is 20 months or 11 months for those granted advanced standing. This type of intensive training in the maritime field is not found in any other institution internationally.

Another purpose of WMU is to provide an effective means of transferring maritime technology from developed to developing maritime nations. The institution promotes the highest standards of maritime safety, efficiency of navigation, and prevention and control of marine pollution. Courses at WMU integrate these specialized academic studies with a dissertation and field training, which takes place in Canada and the United States, Nordic countries, European Community countries and Poland. A further purpose of WMU is for students to graduate with fluent communication skills in the English language, and therefore with the ability to facilitate global maritime operations.

Maritime English

Shipping is international, seafarers are international and English is the international language of maritime communication. Since WMU is an English-medium university, students must be proficient in English at the start of their academic studies. However, many students come from countries where English is not their first language but their second or third language.

The Intensive English Language Programme provides a pre-sessional language proficiency course in English for Academic Purposes. There are two English language courses, 18 weeks and 10 weeks, for non-native speakers of English in need of developing their language proficiency skills. General English language training is provided in part one of the 18 week course and Maritime English, English for Specific Purposes, is given particular emphasis in part two. Students are provided with the language skills to give oral presentations, prepare field training reports, write a thesis and to participate in seminars and conferences.

Factors affecting course planning

The Intensive English Language Programme is provided for non-native speakers of English attending the 20 month university course. Thus, 50% to 60% of WMU students attend the programme. The first factor to consider is that students' proficiency levels range from low intermediate to advanced level. The demands of catering to individual language needs are challenging and have been met to some extent by support components in the programme, such as the use of a language lab as a self-access centre, an English readers library and CALL.

A second factor affecting course planning is the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of students. The classroom environment during the English language programme is multicultural. Cross-cultural communication has a crucial role to play in the maritime field. In addition, both resident and visiting academics at WMU are an international group of experts, both native and non-native speakers of English. Hence,

WMU provides a multicultural forum for participation in teaching and learning by specialists from many nations. An effort is made during the pre-sessional language programme to foster mutual respect, tolerance and sh ing of expertise.

Sharing of expertise is important when students come from a diversity of work experiences. One way of addressing this challenge is the Vessel Disaster Project which is an integrated research and oral presentation task. Students work in groups to tackle the inquiries and reports from a recent maritime disaster and present their findings to their peers and the academic faculty.

A fourth factor is the diverse previous learning experiences which affect course planning, particularly in terms of teaching methodology. Some students expect and initially prefer a formal classroom situation. One aim of the English language programme is for students to gain confidence in group work, accept peer feedback and to recognize that the teacher is a language facilitator rather than a maritime expert.

In addition, mature students sometimes have difficulty in adjusting to a classroom situation and the role of student after many years of being first and foremost technical experts or senior maritime officers. This can lead to frustration, loss of face and anxiety. The language programme makes provision for enhancing social and professional communication skills so that students can take part in conferences and seminars and can also communicate effectively in the student hostel, at the university, and within the Swedish community. Mini fieldwork trips during the English language programme build confidence in the second language and prepare students for on the job training assignments which are an integral part of their postgraduate maritime course.

Summary

English is the international maritime language. It is significant that in the case of the Scandinavian Star ferry disaster, a contributory factor to the tragic loss of lives in the emergency situation was the insufficient command of English of the Portuguese speaking crew and a serious communication breakdown between the Norwegian officers and the crew members. Effective communication skills established at WMU can contribute to the better facilitation of global maritime operations and to reducing the likelihood of maritime disasters in future.

In addition to effective communication, cooperation between nations is necessary in the event of a maritime disaster. IMO aims to implement a global maritime distress safety system mandatory on all ships by 1999. There are benefits of international training for communication and cooperation for shipowners, port administrators, maritime safety

authorities, training institutions and governments. WMU graduates represent a global network of personnel to enhance communication and cooperation between countries in order to meet IMO's objectives of safer shipping and cleaner oceans.

Thus, the World Maritime University encourages international cooperation in solving maritime problems and coordinating action internationally for the benefit of the physical environment. In the words of the Director General of the Danish Maritime Authority, WMU is needed to convey IMO's important message of international maritime cooperation from the administrators of today to the administrators of tomorrow.

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